

Before the
Federal Communications Commission
Washington, DC 20554

In the Matter of)
)
Petition for Rulemaking and Request for Initiation)
of Section 403 Proceeding Into Character of) **RM-10613**
WorldCom, Inc. and Other Commission Licensees)

COMMENTS
REGARDING UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST, INC.'S PETITION
FOR RULEMAKING AND REQUEST FOR INITIATION OF § 403
PROCEEDING INTO CHARACTER OF WORLDCOM, INC. AND
OTHER COMMISSION LICENSEES

SUBMITTED BY THE

National Urban League

January 31, 2003

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The National Urban League urges the Federal Communications Commission (Commission) approve The Office of Communication of the United Church of Christ, Inc.'s (UCC) *Petition for Rulemaking and Request For Initiation of § 403 Proceeding Into Character of WorldCom, Inc. and Other Commission Licensees* (Petition). As articulated in greater detail below, the National Urban League views the approval of UCC's Petition as being in the public interest of consumers in these states.

Statement of Interests

The National Urban League, Inc. (League), founded in 1910, is the premier social service and civil rights organization in America. The League is a nonprofit, community-based organization headquartered in New York City, with 115 affiliates in 34 states and the District of Columbia. The mission of the League is to assist African Americans in the achievement of social and economic equality. The League implements its mission through advocacy, bridge building, program services and research.

Comments

The League supports UCC's Petition quite simply, because it is the right thing to do. The League has a proud history of advocating social and economical inclusion of African Americans into the mainstream. From its focus at the turn of the Twentieth Century to help Southern black migrants overcome racial and economic barriers in the North, to its current Digital Campus program which brings entry-level information and technology literacy skills to low-income communities, the League always looks beyond the obstacles that lay before its constituents and seeks to fashion tools that provide opportunities for social and economic advancement.

The League notes that UCC also has a storied history in dismantling barriers to access. During the Civil Rights Movement, UCC courageously battled with the Commission to protect the public interest by revoking the license of a Jackson, Mississippi based television station (WLBT) that intentionally blocked network feeds of interviews with civil rights advocates like Thurgood Marshall. UCC understood then activist Frantz Fanon's axiom that is worth repeating today, "A community will evolve only when the people control their means of communication." Despite the Commission's protestations to the contrary, the Supreme Court sided with UCC in determining that the Commission must protect our communities from licensees whose misconduct violates the public trust.¹

As we move into the New Millennium, one of this nation's largest challenges is to provide consumers and communities with access to robust and alternative communications service. This nation's recent tragic events underscore just how important it is for people to be able to communicate with one another. Additionally, communications and information technology sector is such an integral part of our nation's economy that it represents one-sixth of our economy.² The misconduct that led to the \$9 billion collapse of WorldCom graphically illustrates just how critical it is for providers of telecommunication services to be not merely profitable, but morally fit as well. The League's constituents face many obstacles towards gaining social and economic advancement. Whether it is the supplier, consumer or minority telecommunications provider trying to compete with a company that is engaged in massive fraud – all are threatened. WorldCom controls over 50% of the nation's Internet infrastructure. It is because of WorldCom's position as a steward of sensitive

¹ *Office of Communication of the United Church of Christ v. FCC*, 359 F.2d 994 (D.C. Cir. 1966) (*UCC I*).

information, its impact on the economy and yes, its ability to control our means of communication that the League strongly supports UCC's Petition.

Specifically, the League urges the Commission to conduct a Section 403 investigation of WorldCom and other Commission licensees and to initiate a rulemaking proceeding towards the adoption of new, higher standards of business conduct to ensure that misconduct, such as that of WorldCom, is prevented. At the minimum these standards should provide protections to consumers and shareholders similar to those used by the Securities and Exchange Commission. Additionally, these rules should provide auditing independence and truth in record-keeping.

III. Conclusion

Thirty-seven years ago UCC had to fight the Commission to protect the public from the misconduct of rogue licensees. Today, the League joins UCC in its struggle to protect the nation's telecommunications infrastructure from those that seek to plunder it. The League's constituents boldly combat social and economic obstacles almost daily. By promulgated UCC's proposed rulemaking and investigating bad actors, the Commission can ensure that these battles are fought fairly. Accordingly, the League strongly requests that the Commission approves UCC's Petition.

Respectfully submitted,

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² *Digital Economy 2002*, the Commerce Department's fourth annual report on the information technology revolution.